

In 2003, artist Julie Lequin moved from her native Quebec to smoggy Los Angeles, where, for the first time in her life, she started to spend significant time in her car.

Around the same time, she began to listen to NPR's call-in show, *Car Talk*. Her casual interest in the radio show and its curmudgeonly hosts quickly developed into a full-blown obsession. Much like people obsessed with their cars, Lequin began to research the show, collect episodes, listen to them religiously and earmark passages of interest in a ritual that mirrored the experience of getting into her car, starting it and driving to her destination.

The resulting video, also entitled *Car Talk*, explores Lequin's unexpectedly visceral reaction—as a young female—to what is ostensibly a radio show about automobile repair. What is immediately clear in the piece is how much the caller's particular vehicle and the problem she is asking advice on, says about the caller herself. In this case, Lequin speaks about her identity as an artist, as someone with a funny accent, and, perhaps, as a young woman struggling with guilt at her inability to confront the friend who has damaged her car. By acting out the roles of the hosts, Lequin expresses her own criticism of her identity, in a refreshingly self-reflexive gesture that is as disarming as it is charming.

*Car Talk* reflects Lequin's experience of LA and of having to develop a "car life," outside of her normal life. Her "car life" was characterized by hours of solitary time, surrounded by thousands of others undergoing the same experience: everyone separated in moving boxes, but moving together in an ebb and flow unique to the physics of traffic.

Lequin manifests this sense of lateral alienation by visually boxing each of the interlocutors into his/her own square. This simple visual device also reinforces the many levels of miscommunication and disconnect implicit in *Car Talk*: between Lequin, the caller, and "Lequin" the call-in show hosts; between people who love their cars and the vehicles themselves; and between drivers and other drivers. But paradoxically, Lequin's *Car Talk* has literally put a face to these manifestations of alienation, and humanized them. Through humour and pathos Lequin has crafted a brilliant vignette that is universally relatable.

- *Anna Phelan*

Anna Phelan is a freelance writer based in Montreal. She's a regular contributor to *Hour Magazine*, the city's second largest English weekly newspaper, and her work has been featured in *Nightlife*, *Naked Eye* and on Pop Montreal's culture blog.